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## LATIN COMPOSITION IN THE PREPARATORY SCHOOLS

IN his attitude towards any subject which forms a part of his pupils' preparation for college, the teacher has to be guided largely by the character of the examination papers set by the colleges, and will, I think, agree that in the admission examinations in Latin Composition a salutary change has come about in recent years. The detached sentences of blessed memory, with their often abysmal silliness of idea, combined with an overdose of constructional tidbits, have very generally given place to a short connected passage of respectable English. What Latin Composition has thus lost as a chronicle of the pupil's knowledge of grammatical eccentricities, it has more than recovered by its greater effectiveness as a means of penetration into the general spirit of the language. This, I take it, is the most valuable function of the study of Latin Composition nowadays, and I regret for its crippling influence upon this function the announcement made by most of the colleges that the passages set for translation into Latin will be based upon certain small portions of some particular Latin author or authors. This limitation has something unpleasantly cut and dried about it, and tends to make more difficult one of the most serious difficulties the teacher meets in trying to inspire his pupils with a live interest in Latin study, namely, their inclination to utter woodenness and mechanicalness and their feeling that, as a French writer has it, Latin is an unpractical, inhuman sort of speech any way — the Romans tried it for several centuries and then gave it up and took to Italian. As long as the classical scholar aimed at the ability to write Latin as a literary accomplishment, the more perfectly he could imitate Cicero, or Cæsar, the more completely he attained his object; but today it is Latin as such, the vitalizing spirit of Latin, that we want to make ours

through our study and practice, not the particular embodiment of that spirit left us by Nepos, or Sallust, or Cæsar, or even Cicero, and although, of course, we cannot imbibe that spirit from the air, and need often to go to these authors as our best guide, we should be on our guard against exalting that guide into a fetich and emphasizing the mechanical element in our work.

To express a given thought in Latin (as in any other language), one has to know three things, the forms of the words needed, their individual meanings, and the relations they have for the time being to each other, or, as these relations are indicated partly by the grammatical construction of the words and partly by their grouping, we may say that one must know four things about the words to be used, their forms, meanings, syntax, and arrangement. And one must not only know these four things, but must know them better in order to write Latin than to read it. You can translate from a foreign language into your own, doing your thinking all the while in the vernacular, but to write or speak a foreign language you must, to a certain extent, think in it. The words must be alive to you and must convey their idea to you directly. There is no royal road to the attainment of this end. It requires minute study of words as representatives of ideas, and ideas as represented by words—a study that needs the same sort of close observation which scientists give to their study of flowers or stones. This seems, perhaps, a painful and slow process, and it does demand a good deal of the teacher, but being constantly reminded that the animal we call “a dog,” for instance, is not, in the eternal nature of things, a “dog” any more than a *canis*, and that when he heard or saw the word *manus*, a Roman boy did not have to translate it into “hand” in order to understand what it meant, the average pupil comes presently to see a glimmering of light, that he is interested in making brighter and brighter until it illumines the whole pathway of his study.

Simple nouns, as the names of objects known to the pupil, are the best words to begin with, and then common verbs and adjectives, such as denote everyday actions and simple quali-

ties, can follow. Synonyms are especially useful, and words which, like *gladius* as compared with "sword," do not cover exactly the same ground, but these mark a second step in the process. If the process seems to any one wasteful of time and strength, let him consider the relative economy of looking up, for instance, the English word "last" in a vocabulary and taking at random or trying to choose one of the words *ultimus*, *postremus*, *supremus*, *extremus*, *proximus*, *novissimus*, and of studying these words with reference to the simple ideas which they primarily represent, noting how each of them is equivalent to some phase of the idea "last." The kind of knowledge that comes in this way and the insight thus gained into the nature of language as such are almost indispensable to one who is to use his own language with any cultivated facility, and they are doubly necessary to our beginners in Latin, partly because of the peculiar differences between Latin and English, and more especially because so large a proportion of the children in our classes come to their work unfurnished with any real linguistic tradition. I do not mean to say it invidiously, but it is a melancholy fact that the greater number of American children do not hear their own language treated at home in a way that tends to lighten their language study.

I used the word "last" as an example, because most of its Latin equivalents have prepositions as their foundation element, and prepositions repay particularly well the kind of study I am suggesting. They represent originally a very simple class of ideas, that of the relation in space between two objects, and these ideas of relation or direction in space offer no more difficulty to the beginner in themselves than do the ideas represented by simple nouns or verbs. What makes the mastery of prepositions in a foreign tongue harder than the mastery of nouns and verbs or adjectives, is that while these latter represent each an idea which pictures itself, to the untrained mind at least, as a single thing or entity, the preposition involves a relation between two things, and that relation varies with the point of view of the mind contemplating it. The act of seeing, for

example, is the same thing, for practical purposes, whoever does the seeing, but one of two objects may be behind or above the other as seen from where I stand, while it is before or below the other from where you stand, and, as soon as we get away from physical relations into the metaphorical relations expressed by various prepositions, the difference in point of view produces all sorts of complications. On the other hand, the very simplicity of the notions "at," "from," "by," etc., makes it hard for the beginner to free himself from the natural first thought that what is "from" to him was "from" to the Roman, and that if "to return with his brother" is *cum fratre redire*, "to kill with a sword" is *cum gladio occidere*. It has always been canonical, when the pupil made this particular blunder, for the teacher to discourse upon the difference between means and accomplishment. I would have things shifted a little, so that what was behind shall be before, and the pupil shall be taught from the beginning to go back of the word and study the thing it stands for, instead of treating the word as itself the thing, as he has a tendency to do. The English word is, to be sure, the only tool he has to work with at first, but so long as that remains an indispensable handle without which he cannot grasp the Latin word, he is struggling to work from the outside, when the essential problem is to discover the best way of getting inside and working from within out. To put it differently, imagine a right angled triangle with an English word at the right angle, an idea at the end of the base, and a Latin word at the end of the perpendicular. It is not difficult to see the advantage possessed by one who can travel freely back and forth along the hypotenuse over one who has to move by way of the other two sides.

Case-forms, tense-forms and the rest should be approached in the same spirit as the words themselves. These variations of declension and conjugation come to mean something and fasten themselves in the memory, when they are seen to be representatives of different phases of an idea, just as separate words are representatives of separate ideas. Case-forms have a difficulty of their own because, being virtually non-existent in English,

they seem unreal to the English speaking pupil when he meets them in Latin. In view of this, the plan sometimes pursued of taking up the verb before the noun has much in its favor, though there are serious disadvantages connected with it in other ways. For instance, the subjunctive mood, which Æneas probably brought up from his visit to the lower regions, is a stumbling block in the way of any complete treatment of the Latin verb early in one's career, and confusion is caused by any arrangement which differs radically from the traditional sequence of subjects in our grammars. But such matters are details which each teacher can best order so as to suit the conditions of his own work, remembering the desirability of putting as much vitality as may be into inflexional differences.

Syntax, the third of the categories into which I divided the knowledge of the words to be used necessary to write Latin well, does not require much mention here. When you have cultivated the habit of observation involved in studying the reciprocal relations of words and ideas in the way I have recommended, it is not difficult to apply the same method to the study of constructions. For some reason, too, syntax seems not to cause the pupils or their teachers so much trouble as the other things. At all events, the boys who came to college when I was teaching at Harvard were better equipped in regard to syntax than in regard to forms or meanings or word-arrangement. To this last I want to call particular attention. I remember being given in my own school days the rather impossible precept to let the order take care of itself until I had learned to manage the other things, which meant, I suppose, that if I put my subject first and verb last the intervening part of the sentence was of secondary importance. Considerable study of the subject has convinced me that both parts of this doctrine are not only erroneous but viciously disastrous. I have been for some time gathering statistics for an exposition of my views on Latin order in general, which I hope to publish by and by, and these statistics show an extraordinary lack of foundation for the subject—first verb—last theory. Fortunately this theory is no longer held in the

honor it was once, though I believe it is still pretty generally taught. But the special point that I want to consider now is the possibility of extracting from the undeniably complicated phenomena of the word-arrangement practiced by the Latin writers some basic principle so simple that it can be readily understood by a beginner and so comprehensive that it is of real value in elementary work.

We all know that the Latin writers had a way of using the order in which they placed their words as a means of marking emphasis at once effectively and delicately in numerous instances, but few teachers reflect how greatly it tends to help a pupil to write Latin that has a Roman ring and how much it clears his vision of the Latin he reads if he is taught always to consider the thought he is going to express by two words as made up of two parts, and to decide which part he wishes to direct the readers's or hearer's attention to more vigorously. He should understand that if he says, *Marcellus ridet*, he means MARCELLUS not Cicero or Lentulus or anybody else, is laughing; if he says *ridet Marcellus*, he means Marcellus is LAUGHING, not singing or sighing or what not, and that a similar thing is true according as he says *Marcello ignoverat* or *ignoverat Marcello*—that it makes no difference whether Marcellus is subject or not. If there are any of my readers to whom it appears a new and possibly untrue proposition that it makes no difference whether Marcellus is subject or not, and who cling to the doctrine we used to be taught, that the position of emphasis for the subject in a Latin sentence was at the end, though for anything except the subject the first was the emphatic place, let me ask them to go to their Cæsars and see if they can detect any difference in kind or degree in the emphasis the great literary soldier puts upon his own name, according as he writes *Cæsari cum id nuntiatum esset*, or *Cæsar etsi intellegebat que de causa ea dicerentur*, or *Cæsar his de causis quas commemoravi Rhenum transire decreverat*, or *Cæsari omnia uno tempore erant agenda*, and so on. Let the pupil be taught that, in the same way, if he says, *fratris liber*, he means his BROTHER'S book, not his sister's or his

father's, but if he says *liber fratris*, he means his brother's BOOK, not his cap or his bicycle; that *fortiter pugnans* means "they are fighting BRAVELY," *pugnans fortiter*, "they ARE FIGHTING bravely," *statua aurea*, is a golden STATUE, not a gold ring, for instance, *aurea statue*, a GOLD statue, not a bronze one. When our complex idea is expressed by an adjective and a noun, as in this last example, a further complication arises, which needs a little deeper study. If we speak of a GOLD statue, emphasizing the adjective, we are contrasting a certain kind of statue with other kinds, if we say a gold STATUE, we are contrasting an object made of gold with objects made of other materials. We may, however, not care to mark either of these contrasts, but only wish to characterize the subject of our thought as a sort of composite entity. When we speak of a brick house, we may not be thinking of its material particularly or of its function as a particular kind of building, but simply wishing to present to the mind a picture of the object known as a brick house. Here there would seem to be a bad difficulty for our incipient Latinist, if the Romans had not done with their word-arrangement in such cases just what we do with our intonation. When we combine an adjective and a noun thus into a unit of expression we put a slight stress of voice upon the noun to mark the unity, and the Romans did precisely the analogous thing in placing the noun before the adjective under such circumstances—as when they applied the words *vir clarissimus* to a man as a mere title of courtesy. The best working rule for the pupil is, therefore, "Unless you want to make your adjective distinctly emphatic, place it after its noun."

Expressions consisting of three or more words were arranged on the same principle, though unless they are very simple they require keener observation, because our only graphic means of illustrating various shades of emphasis—stress of voice or underlining or difference of type—are not delicate enough for many fine distinctions. Still it is not difficult for the pupil to appreciate the principle as applied to such a sentence as *heri pueri ab urbe venerunt*, and it is excellent practice for him to



arrange such sentences in different orders and study the effect. Luckily for him, also, sentences or clauses consisting of more than three or four words are usually made up, not of words strung along separately, as in the example just given, but of words grouped together into phrases, the phrases being strung along as the units of the sentence, so to speak, like the single words in the example. The problem for the pupil is, therefore, first to arrange the separate words in their phases according to the principle I have outlined, and then practically the same considerations will guide him towards giving his phrases a proper sequence in the sentence that guide him in arranging adverbial or prepositional expressions and subordinate clauses in an English sentence. He will, of course, be taught the corollaries of the periodic structure so dear to the Romans, namely, the habit of putting a purpose clause or a clause of cause before the main clause, the tendency of the verb to be unemphatic and close the sentence, and similar matters. The works of Cæsar furnish a splendid opportunity for the study of the way in which thinking in periods causes one to cast the least emphatic part of one's thought into verb form. In the nature of the case, the verb, as the word marking an action, completes the sense of what is said and so finishes the period, unless some word like *ita* or *tantus*, or some adjective needing a noun, or some other suggestion of incompleteness shows that more is to follow. Therefore, in a periodic style the color tends to crowd forward into the other words, and the verb is apt to have little to do except to perform its finishing office. The pupil should be especially taught to notice that it never stands last when it has even slight emphasis upon it.

When the theory and management of phrases and of the period have become more or less familiar it is not a very long step to the twining of sentences together by a proper use of words like *autem*, *quidem*, *vero*, *igitur* (too often, alas, unknown quantities to even the better class of pupils), and especially by choosing for the emphatic idea of the succeeding sentence one which forms a natural transition from the thought in the latter

part of the preceding sentence. This involves, of course, a little maturity of mind, but it is vastly easier to learn if one is trained from the start in what I have called the basic principle of Latin word-arrangement than if one approaches sentences in general with the notion that the subject is to stand first and the verb last, or with any other rule of order based upon purely grammatical considerations.

HENRY PREBLE